

She Said — before 1973

On the phone she said, I have a friend who's got a problem, but she couldn't get to a phone so I'm calling for her. Do you know what I mean? Is this the right place?

When she lay down, she said, Are you a doctor?

Then she said, Aren't you afraid you'll get caught?

When we were putting in the speculum, she said, Oh, I had breakfast before I came. I know I wasn't supposed to but I was so hungry I just ate everything in sight, is that ok?

Later she said, I think I have to throw up.

Or, I have to go to the bathroom right now. Stop. I just have to go to the bathroom, and then I'll come right back.

Or, on a different day, I don't feel so good, should I do it anyway?

The next week she said, Infection? I don't have any infection. Oh, that. That's not really an infection. That infection's nothing, I've had it before, it's nothing, go on, go ahead and take that baby out.

Sometimes she said, Can I see it before you throw it away?

But another time she said, I don't want to look at it, ok? When it comes out, I'll just close my eyes, and you take it away, ok?

Once she said, What do you do with it all at the end of the day? Boy, you people are gonna get in trouble sometime, this's against the law.

And when we were done she said, What if it happens again? You know – this. Would you do me again?

She stood on the back steps outside the counselor's apartment and said, This is mi prima, my cousin, from Mexico. Can you talk Spanish to her? ¿Habla un poco? ¿Un poquito? ¡Si, gringa! We will do this.

No, I'll keep it on, I'm not hot, it's ok, I'm fine. *She was wearing her boyfriend's baseball jacket in the kitchen. She said, Just tell me what I have to know.*

This is my husband, Ed. He's going to sit here with me. *She leaned over, touched his arm, and said, Ed, honey, this is Julie, she's my counselor, the one that got assigned to me when we called the number.*

When we told her she should pay whatever she could afford, she was quiet a minute and then said, I think I can get nine dollars.

My father brought me here today. He's paying for this but he's really mad at me for it. *She took a hundred dollar bill out of her pocket and said, He thinks if everybody got liberated, like with civil rights, that there'd be a lot of trouble, and he says I prove his point, because look what happens when you just do what you want. He says that's why we have to have so many laws on everybody, because if you let people be free and do what they want they'll just do evil things.*

When the sister-in-law was asked why she called the police, she said, It's a sin, she can't do this. She has to have it, we all have to. Jesus doesn't want her to get rid of this baby, that's why I did it.

He doesn't like me to talk to my mother. Him and his mother, they don't let me go home to visit. *She put the tiny baby in her mother's arms and said, We sneaked to come for this appointment. He doesn't know I'm pregnant again. My baby is so new, I can't have another one right away. He wouldn't even want it really, he thinks this one makes too much noise. He doesn't like me to do anything without his permission.*

Holding her purse, wearing her gloves, the girl clinging to her coat sleeve, she said, You take good care of her, she don't know no better, she's just a baby her own self, she don't even know how this happened. She don't know what it's all about, this whole thing.

My mother told me I couldn't keep it, she told me she'd get the baby taken away from me right away if I had it. *She cried, loud crying with snot and choking. She wiped her nose and said, She knows I want to have it. I could be a good mother, I've taken care of babies and I know what to do. But I'm only fifteen so she'll get them to take it away from me, I know she will. That's why I'm doing this! I'd rather not even see it!*

After the cervical injection, she said, How did you learn all this? Did you read a book? Is there a book?

Every now and then, she said, How come you let us bring our boyfriends over to your house to wait? Aren't you afraid they'll tell? *And, Jeez,* who are all these little kids? What're you guys doing, running a kindergarten on the side? Are those doughnuts for us?

When we finished talking and gave her our phone numbers, she said, What if it comes out alive? What should I do then? I can't have it be alive. Should I, you know, should I...? Can I do it by myself? It could be alive, right?

Now and then she said, Oh I'm so sick, what a mess, oh I'm so sorry, I really feel fine but this just happened oh oh here it comes again. Oh god I'm so sorry, I can't help it, I'm such a mess, oh thank you.

She rang the bell, and when we buzzed her in she said, My girlfriends are downstairs. They brought me over when I called you about the cramps. Should they come back for me or can you give me a ride home? How long will it take for it to, you know, all come out?

Another time, waiting to miscarry, she said, I'm sorry it's taking so long. I'm sure you've got other things to do, I know a lot of women are waiting. But thank you so much, thank you for letting me come to your house. I couldn't have done this at my house, for sure. My parents think I'm at my girlfriend's house, I just hope they don't call to check on me, 'cause my girlfriend's mother could say something wrong and then I'd really be in trouble.

Ok, it'll take me about an hour and a half to drive home - I live over the line in Indiana - and here's what I'm going to do, *she said one winter weekend.* My father's a heavy sleeper, so if the cramps come in the night while he's sleeping he'll never hear me; I'll just go in the bathroom and lock the door. I'll do it all in there. He won't even hear the toilet flush, he never does, even when it's just ordinary, you know, flushing for regular reasons.

She looked at the clear plastic sheet on the mattress, the speculum and the syringe. Then she laughed and said, You ladies somethin, doin this up in here; you somethin, all right.

Why do you do this? *She looked around the small bedroom and said,* You're not rich. With what you charge, you can't be doing this for the money. What's it all about? Are you a bunch of women's libbers? Is that it?

I'm not nervous. I think you are good women. I'm never nervous, maybe cuz

I'm always tired. *She was so tired that when the woman beside the bed rocked her shoulder softly to wake her up, she said,* It's over? I'm sorry, I just closed my eyes after the shot you gave me down there. I'm sorry, but I was real tired, I had to work a double shift and din have no time between work and here.

Ohmygod, does this happen all the time? This bleeding? *She gasped and said,* The blood is so dark. Ooh! Ice?! Ay! Make it stop! This ice tray is too cold! Ohmygod! You better not be scared, I'm the one scared, not you. Orange juice, are you kidding? Ay, what if I faint? I know people faint when they lose blood. Can you still do me? Did you finish?

She leaned over to the woman driving and quietly said, My daughter's in Children's Memorial, she's only two, she's having an operation on her stomach valve today – it doesn't work right, since she was born. My husband's over there, with her, for that, while I'm here, for this. Could I leave right after I'm done? Could you take me back right away, so I don't wait 'til everybody is done? Would that be ok? Would the other women mind, do you think?

She gulped some water in the kitchen and said, Oh thank you, you'll never know what this means to me. Thank you so much. I could never thank you enough, I'm sure. I know some people say it's wrong, abortion, that you shouldn't take a life. And maybe we did take a life. But it's all give and take, isn't it? My mother always said that everything comes down to give and take. So I think the baby, today, that was the taking – and me, me in my own life, I think that was the giving.



Judith Arcana. Photo: Jonathan Arlook.

Acknowledgments

“She couldn’t be sure what he’d say” first appeared in *Women’s Global Network for Reproductive Rights Newsletter* #71.

“Jocasta Interviewed in Hell” first appeared in *Family Reunion*, Chicory Blue Press, 2003.

“Talking about Suzie, 1959” first appeared in *Hurricane Alice*, 13/2-3, 1998.

“Sheila’s Deposition, 1997” first appeared in *pms: poem/memoir/story* #4, 2004.

“Celia Finally Responds, 1998” first appeared in *The Oregon Review*, Spring/Summer 2001.

“Noreen’s Phone Calls, 1999” first appeared in *pms: poem/memoir/story* #4, 2004.

“For All the Mary Catholics” first appeared in *POOL* #4, 2005.

“In the Service We Said” first appeared in *pms: poem/memoir/story* #1, 2001.

“Here Is What Happened” first appeared in *Reproductive Health Matters*, Summer 2002.

“She Said” first appeared in *Calyx* 17/3, Winter 1998.

All work by Judith Arcana except “Celia Finally Responds, 1998” appears in her book *What if your mother*, published by Chicory Blue Press in 2005.